DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 067 720 CS 500 026

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TITLE Leadership Styles: An Experimental Study to Determine the Comparative Effectiveness of Democratic and Autocratic Leadership in Adult, "Real World" Groups.
PUB DATE Apr 72
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Convention of the Southern States Speech Assn. (San Antonio, Texas, April 5-7, 1972)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Group Dynamics; *Group Relations; Group Unity; *Interaction Process Analysis; Interpersonal Relationship; *Leadership Styles; *Participation; Productivity

ABSTRACT

To study the effect of democratic and autocratic leadership styles upon the commitment and productivity of voluntary adult groups, eight tenant councils, composed of approximately six persons each, were selected to serve as experimental groups. Trained researchers acting as discussion leaders for each council functioned as either democratic or autocratic leaders. The significant finding of this study was that authoritarian group leaders fostered slightly greater group productivity and commitment to policy proposals than democratic leaders. (Author/LG)

ED 067720

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LEADERSHIP STYLES

An Experimental Study to Determine the Comparative Effectiveness of Democratic and Autocratic Leadership in Adult, "Real World" Groups

by

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Accepted for Presentation at the 1972 Annual Convention of:

The Southern Speech Communication Association

San Antonio, Texas, U.S.A.

April 5-7, 1972

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1930's under the direction of such investigators as William Foote Whyte, Ronald Lippitt, Ralph White, and of course, Kurt Lewin fairly specific hypotheses and theories concerning interpersonal influence,[1] leadership, and group life[2] began to be posited and systematically investigated.[3] Especially fruitful was the work of Lewin, Lippitt, and White who studied the ways in which the behavior of ten and eleven year old boys varied as a function of authoritarian, laissez-faire, and democratic styles of leadership.

> These studies . . . demonstrated that group behavior can be studied under controlled conditions similar to those utilized for scientific experimentation. This method revealed that certain forces of social behavior can be measured and analyzed.
>
> The earlier studies, supported by later work done during World War II by sociologists studying the American soldier under varying group conditions, resulted in wide acceptance of the following generalizations concerning leadership:
>
> a. Democracy can be efficient.
> b. Autocracy can create much hostility and aggression, including aggression against scapegoats.
> c. Autocracy can create discontent that does not appear on the surface.
> d. There is more dependence and less individuality in autocracy.
> e. There is more group mindedness and more friendliness in democracy.[4]

Leadership, with its many ramifications for styles, techniques, goals and processes continues to be a topic of interest to social scientists.[5] Hare defines the leader as one type of central person who may have the power to control the activity of a group and to have status and influence over other

group members. He further defines two major categories of leadership as task and socio-emotional behavior. The group leader facilitates those behaviors which will maximize productivity of a group's task.

Autocratic leadership is described in the literature as based on the leader who initiates action, dominates policy, dictates the work techniques and attitudes, controls the future, rewards and penalizes, controls and evaluates his subordinates, and is generally directive.

The democratic leader is the person who involves others in the policy planning, in procedural decisions, and in evaluating effectiveness. Moreover, he tends to create a satisfying and rewarding atmosphere because of these behavioral attitudes.

Drawing upon this body of knowledge, a theoretical hypothesis of leadership may be postulated as follows:

Theoretical Hypothesis

In voluntary groups, the democratic leader will facilitate positive group climate and commitment on the part of the participants to a greater extent than the authoritarian leader. The authoritarian leader, however, will facilitate greater group productivity or efficiency than will the democratic leader.

Working Hypotheses

In order to operationalize the theoretical hypothesis, an experiment was designed in order to test the hypotheses that: (1) Autocratically led tenant councils will be more efficient showing greater productivity in task-related roles than will democratically led groups. (2) Democratic leaders of tenant councils in public housing projects will produce greater commitment to policy suggestions made during the course of a single meeting of the council. (3) There will be a more positive group climate engendered by democratic leaders than by autocratic leaders.

Since these three characteristics seemed to be distinguishing features between authoritarian and democratic leadership, and were consistent within all studies, it was upon these criteria that the study focused.

PROCEDURE

In order to test the working hypotheses, permission was obtained from the Allegheny County Housing Authority of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, to meet twice with eight tenant councils in eight different public housing projects. (See Appendix A for names of projects.)

These councils had been in existence for about three months, and were generally composed of about six persons, three or more of whom were officers. The tenant councils

were of highly equated composition in that members were drawn from similar socio-economic background, were people of the same age distribution, were primarily women, and had all been exposed to similar physical environments. The councils were told that the Authority had contracted with the University of Pittsburgh to undertake a research project to determine how tenant councils could become more effective. The ensueing group discussions focused on this subject.

The research team consisted of six persons, four of whom were to act as discussion leaders, performing the role four times, twice as the democratic leader, and twice as the autocratic leader. Two members of the team were assigned as observers at each of the sixteen meetings. To avoid an expectation bias in the gathering and evaluation of data, a modified double blind design was used.

The format for performing the role of democratic or authoritarian leader was established prior to the meetings with the tenant councils. (See guidelines in Appendix B.) In order to execute these roles more effectively, role playing sessions were conducted under the assumption supported by the studies of Lewin, Lippitt, White, and Bavelas that leaders of a specific type can be trained.[6]

The experimental sessions were held on the sites of the individual projects, most often in the community buildings, and on occasion in a tenant's apartment. During the course

of each of the meetings, data was gathered recording the interaction pattern, the group climate, and the efficiency and productivity.

It was expected that if the hypotheses were supported, the data would reveal that (1) the democratically led groups would show less productivity or efficiency, but (2) more commitment than autocratically led groups; and (3) would have a more positive group climate. The results of the experiment testing these hypotheses are reported in the Findings represented in the following section.

FINDINGS

This section presents both a numerical and a verbal description of the findings of the study. The numerical description of each unit will precede the verbal description pertaining to that unit of analysis in the hope that the two methods of explanation will mutually complement and clarify each other. For the sake of clarity, each statistical table will be presented intact without being carried over from the preceding page, even if a portion of the page bearing the verbal description must be left blank.

TABLE 1

PRODUCTIVITY OR EDDICIENCY

Leadership	Level of Efficiency: High	Level of Efficiency: Low
Autocratic	8	0
Democratic	4	4

The efficiency of the group was measured by counting the number of policy suggestions made and assessing the average amount of time required to get each suggestion. Thus, the formula for determining the group efficiency was:

$$\frac{\text{Total Time of Deliberation}}{\text{Number of Policy Proposals}}$$

The total amount of time spent in formal meetings with tenant councils was 1500 minutes or 25 hours. The greatest amount of time required to get one suggestion was 24 minutes, the smallest was 7 minutes. The median of this, 15 1/2 minutes, was used to determine high or low group efficiency. The results are recorded in Table 1.

The table indicates that all eight groups operating under authoritarian leadership had high efficiency; whereas, under democratic leadership four groups showed high efficiency and four groups showed low efficiency. Utilizing Yates' correction for continuity chi-square formula,

$$x_c^2 = \frac{N([AD - BC] - N/2)^2}{(A + B)\ (C + D)\ (A + C)\ (B + D)},\ x_c^2 = 3.00$$

which is not statistically significant at any normal level of confidence. (P .05 = 3.841, P .10 = 2.706.) However, the difference which is present does approach the .05 level of confidence and does suggest that the autocratic leaders probably were more effective in engendering group productivity or efficiency than were the democratic leaders.

TABLE 2

COMMITMENT

Leadership	Level of Commitment: High	Level of Commitment: Low
Autocratic	6	2
Democratic	2	6

The commitment of the groups was assessed in terms of how many of the policy suggestions had been acted upon when the groups were contacted two weeks after the meeting under consideration had taken place. Those groups which had acted upon half or more of the suggestions were said to have had high commitment, and those which had acted upon less than half were described as having low commitment.

The results of this assessment are shown in Table 2. The figures here show that the highest commitment was demonstrated in the groups having authoritarian leadership (6 out of 8, or 75%); the lowest commitment was found in the

groups having democratic leadership (2 out of 8, or 25%). Once again, utilizing Yates' x^2 correction for continuity, these results were not statistically significant, but, in contrast to the hypothesis, the trend favored the autocratically led groups rather than the democratically led ones.

TABLE 3

GROUP CLIMATE

		Climate of Group	
		Positive	Negative
Leadership	Autocratic	8	0
	Democratic	8	0

This type of group climate which existed in the groups was measured by an instrument developed by the experimenters and used by the participants to indicate their opinions of the type of group climate which existed. (See Appendix C for Group Climate Chart.) The instrument was so constructed that an individual's assessment of group climate

could be given a numerical value between 0 and 25. The scores for each group were summed and a mean found. The group mean then was used to determine if the group felt that the climate was positive or negative. Those which had means of 12 1/2 or above were considered positive. Those groups whose means were below 12 1/2 were considered negative.

Table 3 indicates that the type of leadership had no statistically significant effect on group climate. All groups studied rated themselves as having a positive group climate.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that the hypotheses are not fully supported by the findings. (1) Autocratically led tenant councils were more efficient, as was hypothesized, and they did show some greater productivity in task-related roles than did the democratically led groups, but this difference was slight ($P < .10$). (2) Democratic leaders of tenant councils in public housing projects did not produce greater commitment to policy suggestions. (3) The group climate resulting from the differing forms of leadership showed no statistically significant difference.

We believe that several factors inherent in the experiment may have been responsible for the results obtained. (1) Tenant councils in public housing projects

are frequently subjected to an authoritarian environment and are more familiar with, and perhaps comfortable in, that situation. Thus, their efficiency was greater when operating under authority. (2) When the leader took the role of the authoritarian figure, he represented not only the control of management, but the authority of the University. In other words, a proposal from the leader carried with it the weight of management and the supposed wisdom of a university world. Under those circumstances, it would be difficult to resist following his suggestions. Thus, the commitment to the suggestion might be more presumed than in the case of the democratic leader who, while also representing management and the University, played down these factors, thereby casting himself more on a par with the members of the group and, therefore, decreasing the distance between himself and the others. Suggestions were thus seen as coming more from the group than the leader and would not carry as much weight as in the authoritarian case. Moreover, (3), the findings must be interpreted in light of the limited number of meetings which could be held with the tenant councils.

Based on the results of the analysis of data and subject to the previously discussed limitations, this experiment warrants the following conclusions:

Under certain circumstances, and insofar as this population is concerned, authoritarian group leadership fosters

slightly greater group productivity and commitment to policy proposals than does democratic group leadership. Both leadership methods engender approximately equal group climate. This is in contrast to the findings of Lewin, Lippitt, and White whose studies indicate that while authoritarian leadership should foster somewhat greater group productivity, it also produces less group commitment and greater group hostility.

With increasing emphasis being placed upon involvement of tenant organizations in the management of their housing communities, these findings may have significance for the effective development of such councils. As Homans points out in *The Human Group*

> The fact is that leadership in a group may be at one time abrupt, forceful, centralized, with all communications originating with the leader, and at another time slow, relaxed, dispersed, with much communication back and forth between leader and followers. Each mode is acceptable, appropriate, and authoritative, but each in different circumstances.[7]

To say, therefore, that tenant councils can be more effective under autocracy rather than democracy is not to make a value judgement that such leadership is either good or bad. This conclusion represents a proposition of fact not value.

APPENDIX A

Housing Projects Used in Study

(1) Ohio View Acres (Stowe Township)

(2) McKees Rocks Terrace (McKees Rocks)

(3) Morgan (South Fayette)

(4) Hawkins Village (Rankin)

(5) Burns Heights (Duquesne)

(6) Sharps Terrace (Sharpsburg)

(7) Groveton (Coroapolis)

(8) Park Apartments (Natrona Heights)

APPENDIX B

Training Guidlines

Since the experiment deals with relationship between two distinctive styles of leadership (autocratic and democratic) and group interaction and production, one needs to delineate the major characteristics of each style so to "create and learn" those behaviors which typify the style we are to emulate as discussion leaders. A seminal study regarding differential leadership styles is that of Lewin, Lippitt, and White's comparison of a democratic and autocratic atmosphere and their effects on group dynamics. In this study using groups of ten to eleven year old children in a mask making club, they created differing atmospheres by using specific techniques. Utilizing this model, the following is a suggested guideline for the training to operationalize the different styles of leadership. For this study, the style of leadership began with the set-up of the meeting and carried through to departure. A comparison of techniques is suggested as follows:

DEMOCRATIC	AUTOCRATIC
(1) All policies a matter of group determination, encouraged and drawn out by the leader.	(1) All determination of policy by the strongest person (leader).

(2) The room is set-up in circular seating arrangement. No seating preference for leader.	(2) Long table preferred with discussion leader at head or pivotal spot.
(3) Informal conversation and pleasantries exchanged to all on an equalitarian basis. Leader and observers mobile and friendly.	(3) Limit informal conversation to president of the tenant council. Communication to flow through the president or to designated heirchal roles. Observers may circulate.
(4) Determine from the group why they are present and encourage group determination of goals. Brain storm and listen. Leader may define limits within which the group may function.	(4) State clearly the purpose of the meeting, as coming from the power structure. Engage the president in explaining as a secondary measure as to the goals of the group...what they should be. Make known our goals.
(5) Primarily, encourage and elicit participation from all to enhance the socio-emotional atmosphere and group process. Share freely and frankly own limitations but belief in shared responsibility to do something about the problems.	(5) Opposite - autocratic leader. Refer frequently to management as the final authority. May assure group of skills in dealing with management.
(6) Following involvement, leader may feedback group's position on problems and develop with the group procedural perspective or priorities. Members free to choose problems to be discussed.	(6) Select out a likely problem to be discussed. May cite own appeal to the selected one. Stick to the agenda.
(7) Where technical advice is needed, present several alternatives or options to the group. Encourage discussion around the solutions. Inquire of members as to their knowledge or skill in these areas. Acknowledge own lack of knowledge or expertise, but suggest ways of finding out.	(7) Steer discussion on limited choice or/and restrict discussion space on the basis of power approval, your past experiences, or theoretical knowledge. Speak in terms of threatening consequences and play into concept of limited group powers. Emphasize the practical.

(8) Free communication of member to member (circular). Use members names to involve or to give credit to ideas of members. Permit some irrelevant discussion, and use skill to relate this to the topic at hand.	(8) Create barriers to communications by maintaining status position whereby the communication flows from leader to member and vice-versa. Interrupt side conversations as destructive to the group process. Use decisive manner. Call on members to respond to your queries.
(9) The leader attempts to be a group member in spirit and in discussion but does not perform much of the actual task. Use the terms "we" and "us".	(9) The leader establishes himself apart from the group and carries a distinct role He remains aloof from active participation ever mindful of his role as authority figure. He is distinct in separating "you from I".
(10) Give objective praise and criticism. Reward and reinforce individual and group behavior for achievement of task and socio-values, including personal satisfactions.	(10) Criticize or praise without giving objective reasons, but emphasize personal preferences. Discredit ideas on basis of practicality or wisdom, in view of the group's needs rather than goals. Demonstrate expertise as much as possible.
(11) The democratic leader seeks to facilitate the group's task and process for the experience value to the members.	(11) The autocratic leader seeks to facilitate his own tasks and goals in behalf of the group's needs and goals as he perceives them. Sells his own ideas for solutions.
(12) Give members opportunities to guide, initiate, determine, interpret, administer, or evaluate as group functions. Silences may be interpreted as thinking time.	(12) Do not relinquish leadership functions as invested in the leader for directing, initiating, administering, and evaluation. Silences mean consent and agreement with leader.
(13) Agree with group on concluding discussion.	(13) Remind group of time limits and end meeting as a leader's perrogative.

APPENDIX C

Measuring Instrument for Group Climate

Each of the statements below refers to a different aspect of group climate in the discussion. In one of the five spaces at the right of each statement, please place a check mark to indicate your best estimate of that aspect of climate. One (1) represents the lowest score and five (5) the highest.

ASPECTS OF GROUP CLIMATE	1	2	3	4	5
(1) Pleasantness: everyone seems to enjoy the discussion.					
(2) Involvement: members are eager to participate and do so. They feel safe in speaking and contribute to the best of their ability.					
(3) Permissiveness: members and leader do not dominate; group makes most decisions; atmosphere relaxed, accepting, informal.					
(4) Productivity: members keep at the job, produce effectively.					
(5) Flexibility: group adjusts to changing needs, profits from mistakes					

FOOTNOTES

Mr. Fadely, a Ph.D. candidate in Rhetoric and Public Address at The University of Pittsburgh, is The Director of Forensics at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Mrs. Fadely, M.Ed., University of Pittsburgh, teaches special education in the Greensboro City School System. We acknowledge our appreciation to the other members of the research team: Charles Allen, Betty Kerr, Ken Liang, Mary Page, and Gloria Schlenke.

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[3]Don Martindale, *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960).

[4]Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, *Group Dynamics* (Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, 1962), p. 552.

[5]Paul A. Hare, *Small Group Research* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), p. 295.

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